

ISSUE

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BI-MONTHLY
EC NEWSLETTER
FOR
SCHOOL LEADERS

exceptional LEADERSHIP

The Science of Implementation

Our newsletter will focus on one particular aspect of educating students with disabilities in each issue. The topic will be considered using three lenses which are taken from the literature on implementation—competency drivers, organizational drivers, and leadership.

COMPETENCY DRIVERS (page 2)

Competency drivers are those mechanisms that help develop and sustain the faculty's ability to deliver an intervention to students. These include staff selection, training, coaching, and performance assessment.

ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS (page 3)

Organizational drivers are those mechanisms that produce systems that nurture and sustain (rather than impede) effective practices. These include decision support data systems, facilitative administration and systems intervention.

LEADERSHIP (page 4)

Both technical and adaptive leadership are important for managing these implementation drivers to improve outcomes.



this issue

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WHY YOU? Our Focus on Principals

At first glance, a newsletter for school leaders about the education of students with disabilities might be thought to address Exceptional Children (EC) directors, EC teacher-leaders, or administrators of separate schools and state programs. However, this newsletter is specifically designed to support principals and assistant principals in thousands of schools in NC that serve students with disabilities every day. As school administrators, many of us have limited experience in special education—programs that have exceptionally complex challenges and require **exceptional leadership**.

As an instructional leader, supervisor, and community leader, the world of special education presents distinctive opportunities

to achieve more than just compliance. If outcomes are going to improve for students with disabilities in our state, principals and assistant principals will play key roles in implementing important changes in our daily classroom practices.

Our efforts in this newsletter are intended to aid you in addressing the challenges presented in administering programs for exceptional children within your school. The articles—alongside their complementary blogs, webinars, and professional development events—are created to provide the specific, relevant information you need to be influential leaders in this area.

With each newsletter, a specific topic will be addressed from a variety of perspectives. Upcoming topics will include behavior and discipline, co-teaching and service delivery models, supporting students with autism, working with related service providers, and transitions to adulthood. This month we have simply introduced the format, the role of implementation science in our approach, and some “big picture” ideas that are key for this year—using the teacher evaluation instrument and moving toward the new curriculum standards. **EL**



<http://exceptionalleadership.wikispaces.com>

Defining Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is explicit, guided instruction that proceeds systematically to develop a critical repertoire of behaviors. Initially developed in the middle of the last century as an instructional approach for students with disabilities, direct instruction has been validated as effective instruction for a variety of struggling learners in many empirical studies over the last fifty years

Technically, direct instruction has come to mean an educational approach or philosophy. However, in schools direct instruction is a term that is often used to describe published curricula that adheres to the principles of direct instruction. There are a number of direct instruction programs (or programs highly influenced by direct instruction approaches) being implemented in schools throughout North Carolina. For students with persistent learning challenges, direct instruction can be an important part of the students' educational program.

If your teachers are using these programs, many of the evaluation and feedback issues discussed in the adjacent article may be especially relevant for your work.

COMPETENCY DRIVERS



Assessing teachers who use direct instruction programs

Using the teacher evaluation instrument with your EC teachers

On a variety of levels, the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System may seem to be ill-fitted to educators using a direct instruction (DI) program that is highly sequenced and systematic. Depending on the program, principals (and the teachers that they evaluate) may have difficulty recognizing opportunities for the integration of technology, the use of a "variety" of instructional methods, or student collaboration in DI lessons. Looking deeper, however, the appropriate implementation of evidence-based direct instruction programs is a powerful indication of an educator's professional competence.

USING TECHNOLOGY

Direct instruction programs may or may not include online or software-based components. Angie Cloninger, an expert in DI programs, points out that "the technological tools in today's classrooms can be appropriated to facilitate and extend the activities in DI literacy programs." For example, the touch screen technologies in interactive white boards and tablets make it possible for teachers to substitute digital experiences for magnetic alphabets to

facilitate the physical manipulation of letters and words. In addition, the videos and images that are freely available on the web can assist teachers in illustrating key new vocabulary—particularly for students with problems in language comprehension. All teachers should find opportunities to move the lesson off of the page, giving text colorful and interactive support.

CREATIVITY

According to many principals, documenting the creativity of teachers who are using direct instruction programs


seems to be a challenge. But, teachers and principals alike should see the opportunity for creativity both in and around the use of DI programs. Within the context of DI lessons, teachers demonstrate creativity in responding to the immediate motivational and mastery needs of the students in the group. Even more, the creativity of teachers

should be demonstrated in the activity and context around the focused interventions. Classroom arrangement, instructional displays, classroom management practices, and lesson extensions might all be areas in which the creativity of teachers can be assessed. The important thing to remember is that systematic should not mean stifling.

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STUDENT LEADERS

Another issue for many principals is the difficulty of observing in DI lessons the standards' requirement for students to "work in teams and

develop leadership qualities." School leaders must understand that structured experiences still require collaboration and cooperation. DI programs tend to be highly interactive and those social interactions are crucial for maintaining motivation and achieving mastery during the lessons. 




Special Education & Standards Reform in the US

The Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE) of NC Department of Public Instruction together with the Race to the Top and the adoption of Common Core State and NC Essential Standards have put curriculum reform at the forefront of our attention this year. Programs for students with disabilities must continue to be considered in our movement toward the new standards and new assessments.

As the supplemental document released with the Common Core

State Standards clearly indicates, special education must be expected to “retain the rigor and high expectations of the Common Core State Standards.” If this vision is to be realized, each school must work to not only provide appropriate accommodations and modifications, but also to embark on real efforts in Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Just as building a school is an excellent opportunity to make facilities accessible to those with disabilities, building a new system of curricular standards,

instructional practices, and assessments presents an unprecedented opportunity for schools and districts throughout the state to take UDL seriously.

Importantly, our leaders have maintained the focus on including programs for exceptional children in planning and executing the reform efforts at state and national levels. However, this work can only be achieved if similar inclusive planning takes place in local school districts and even individual schools. 

HOT TOPIC School Discipline Law Change

This summer, Governor Perdue signed into law a revision to the code governing school discipline. While the new law still allows school districts to write codes of student conduct, the revisions to the law will require many school boards to reconsider some recommendations and practices. Most notably, the new law restricts the “zero tolerance” policies that were written into the policies of many districts. While technically this law does not change the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, it is important to remember that disciplinary action taken with students with disabilities can never be more severe than action that would be taken with non-disabled peers. A link to the full-text of the law can be found on our site, <http://exceptionalleadership.wikipaces.com/disciplinelaw>.

TECH TOOL: GLOGSTER

Glogster is a tool that allows users to create interactive posters easily. The tool creates a virtual poster with text, pictures, music, and even video. While other software can accomplish similar ends, glogs are simple to do. Clearly students love it, but consider using glogs as a way to celebrate the achievements of staff or to document events in your school. Build spirit and model tech integration at the same time!



Ask the EC Division...

Q: Is co-teaching the best way to provide EC services in high school?

A: There are many reasons that schools should consider creating co-teaching teams that help deliver support for students with disabilities in the general education classes. Benefits include the minimization of social costs of more restrictive environments, the improved alignment of specially designed instruction and general curriculum, and the



added value of two certified professionals with a classroom of students. However, it is very important to remember that the decision of how to provide specially designed instruction is like all decisions in Individualized Education Programs—the student's needs should be considered INDIVIDUALLY. Students can suffer just as much from inappropriately low levels of support as from overly restrictive environments. High schools—like primary, elementary, and middle schools—should consider co-teaching models as a part of a full continuum of approaches to delivering special education.

ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS


LEADERSHIP

Adaptive & Technical Leadership: What is the difference?

Leadership of schools—particularly programs for students with disabilities—requires two types of leadership: technical and adaptive. Both are important for changing practices and improving results.

Technical leadership refers to leading your school with expertise and clarity in those areas in which specific and definite solutions are available. In other words, this type of leadership requires us to “do our homework” on the explicit knowledge of our work—policy details, current legal issues, evidence-based practices, etc.

Adaptive leadership is about leading an organization in those areas in which clear, proven answers are unavailable. This type of leadership requires more tacit knowledge about the features of your organization and your community, the process of change, and the relationships between systems and people in your local context.

With all of our history since 1975’s landmark legislation, improvement of educational programs for students with disabilities in the 21st century depends on the ability of school leaders to move both general education faculty and special education teachers beyond our problematic paradigms and traditional approaches. Principals need to build both technical competence and adaptive capacity in leading programs for exceptional children. 

Issue 01 Webinar: Adaptive Leadership & RtI November 4, 2011 (1:00pm)

RtI is a perfect example of an area in which technical leadership is not enough. Join us as we discuss the role of principals as adaptive leaders in implementing RtI.

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This newsletter is a publication of the Exceptional Children Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. If you have questions or comments about the newsletter, please contact:

David Tillman
Leadership Development & Planning Consultant
6356 Mail Center Drive
Raleigh, NC 27699-6356
[P] (919)807-3994
[F] (919)807-3243
[E] david.tillman@dpi.nc.gov

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Other Upcoming Events...

• Book Study & Online Discussion: *Leadership Without Easy Answers* THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2011 – 1:00pm

Ronald A. Heifetz is a world-renown expert in adaptive leadership. His classic work draws on many years of research involving public and private leaders to consider the task of leading complex organization through change. Read the book and join us to share questions and comments and to specifically consider the book’s relevance for our work.

• 61st Conference on Exceptional Children – Greensboro, NC OCTOBER 30-NOVEMBER 2, 2011

The conference is not just for your EC teachers! You are warmly invited to join us at the conference and attend sessions on school reform, legal issues in special education, collaboration between service providers, and much more. Register online at <http://dpi.state.nc.us/ec/conference>.

For more information about these events, the articles in this issue, or other issues related to school leaders and EC programs, visit our site by simply scanning this code with your mobile device.

